

Dear Chairs Williams and Lopes, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Josh Guo and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **H.B 5208 - An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons**. This bill would make it a discriminatory practice for housing providers to not consider a prospective tenant based on a criminal conviction after certain time periods. Specifically, housing authorities would not be allowed to consider convictions of misdemeanors over 3 years before the rental application, or convictions of felony over 7 years before the rental application. It is imperative that it passes, to provide a second chance for many who have moved beyond convictions.

Currently in Connecticut, housing authorities can refuse to rent to any formerly incarcerated person, even for crimes committed many years ago. Barriers to reentry from the prison system are detrimental both to the formerly incarcerated and to the communities where those individuals come from. The lack of fair housing for formerly incarcerated people is a major roadblock for those trying to re-emerge in society, and contributes heavily to the "revolving door" of homelessness and punishment—including a state recidivism rate of 34%. Even for smaller misdemeanor charges without any conviction that happened years ago — such as conviction for conduct that occurred when the applicant was a minor — under present law, an applicant may be denied housing for that reason.

The risk of homelessness for those released from custody is immensely greater than the risk for those who have no incarceration histories. Approximately, 25% of Connecticut's homeless population is currently living with a criminal record, with national disparities reaching as much as THIRTEEN times higher rates of incarceration for those who have been incarcerated, versus those who have not. By not providing fair housing for formerly incarcerated people, Connecticut is perpetuating a cycle that funnels people in and out of the prison system and makes the re-entry process all the more difficult for everyone involved. This process would be vastly improved by increased housing opportunities. This bill would also alleviate the burden on shelters—48% of people who utilized homeless shelters between 2016 and 2019 in Connecticut had a DOC criminal record.

In conclusion, I urge you to provide a second chance at housing for those who committed crimes outside of the 3 and 7 year windows as outlined in H.B 5208. Instead of subjecting formerly incarcerated Connecticut residents to a cycle of criminalization — even for minor misdemeanors committed long ago — this state should seek to make the re-entry process as smooth as possible by mitigating the hardships that come when individuals emerge from prison. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Housing Committee so that a second chance may be given to those who most need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Josh Guo
New Haven, CT